Published and Copyright (c) 1999 - 2003
All Rights Reserved

Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Martin Doering
Kevin Savetz

To subscribe to A-ONE, change e-mail addresses, or unsubscribe, log on to our website at: www.atarinews.org and click on "Subscriptions".
OR subscribe to A-ONE by sending a message to: dpj@atarinews.org and your address will be added to the distribution list.
To unsubscribe from A-ONE, send the following: Unsubscribe A-ONE
Please make sure that you include the same address that you used to subscribe from.

To download A-ONE, set your browser bookmarks to one of the following sites:

http://people.delphiforums.com/dpj/a-one.htm
http://www.icwhen.com/aone/
http://a1mag.atari.org
Now available:
http://www.atarinews.org

Visit the Atari Advantage Forum on Delphi!
http://forums.delphiforums.com/atari/

=~=~=~=

~ AOL Spam-Block Record! ~ People Are Talking! ~ EmuTOS Updated!
~ PC Crashes? Shoot It! ~ Feds Seize Web Domains ~ eBay Invincible?
~ Half.com To Shut Down! ~ Weblogging Takes Hold! ~ Another PayPal Scam!
~ Longhorn Leaked Again! ~ Raster Music Tracker! ~ EmuaPC Upgraded!

-* Cyber Paint Goes Open Source *-
-* Judges Attack Child Porn Crackdown! *-
-* Supreme Court Will Decide Library Filters! *-

=~=~=~=

->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Spring may be due in a couple of weeks according to the calendar, but you'd have to have quite an imagination to believe it! It's been typically "New England-ish" here again this week. Relatively mild temperatures, bone-chilling cold, and now more snow as I sit here and put this week's issue together. I don't know how much more of this winter I can take! Forty some odd years ago, I would have been in heaven with this stuff, but not now! Where is that Spring-like weather??

I'll admit it - I use AOL. I added my membership because of a special rate offering a few years ago because I'm a Compuserve member. For an extra five dollars, I could get AOL. Because my father's internet access through my brother was in jeopardy, I took the membership and made sure my father had one of my account names for his own use. I was never a fanatic about upgrading my AOL software every time AOL released a new version. In fact, up until a few months ago, I was still using AOL 5.0. I recently upgraded to AOL 8.0 because my old version got corrupted somehow and I decided to upgrade to the latest version. One of the features that I like the most in this new version is the ability to have AOL block e-mail addresses that I report as spam.

In this week's issue, there is an article relating the fact that AOL has set records (at least according to AOL!) blocking spam from ever getting to its members. This may or not be true. I do know that since I first saw similar reports on AOL about its efforts to block more and more spam, I've been getting more spam to one of my AOL accounts! And I "report" an average of 100 spam messages weekly!

Do spammers really believe that most people are actually going to read their crap and take it seriously? Do you ever take advantage of any of the many "gotta have" offers that you receive? Seriously, spam has reached a high level of epidemic proportions, of electronic garbage. I spend a lot of time sorting through this crap, reporting some of it, and deleting it all. It's really ridiculous. I can't wait until the day I see more ways to deal with this stuff and get rid of it; and then see those who stuff this crap down our proverbial throats pay for it. Anyway, I hope that AOL continues to improve its methods of blocking spam. Maybe the next time I hear that familiar "You've Got Mail!", it will actually be real mail!

Until next time...

=~=~=~=

Cyber Paint Goes Open Source

After a period of silence there is now a new project available on The Orphaned Projects Page, and this time it is Jim Kent’s Cyber Paint.

This application is a real ST classic of the 80s, and was highly appreciated for its ability to handle both painting as well as animations. For additional information about the program you can visit the Cyber Paint page on Antic:

http://www.asterius.com/atari/cyberpaint

To download or read more about the sources and the license they are under, please go to The Orphaned Projects Page:

http://topp.atari-users.net

regards,

Joakim

EmuTOS 0.6 Released

Dear Atari Community!

We are happy to announce the third beta release of EmuTOS

EmuTOS 0.6 --- 22. Feb. 2003

INTRODUCTION

EmuTOS is a single-user single-tasking operating system for the 32 bit Atari computers and emulators. It is meant to be a replacement for the TOS-images typically needed today for using emulators and it is also running on some real hardware, like the Atari Mega STE. As all the source code is open and free it is could even run on totally new machines in the future.

EmuTOS has been developed for nearly two years now and is licensed under the OpenSource Gnu General Public Licence (GPL).

CHANGES SINCE LAST RELEASE

- Working vr_trnfm implementation
- Native feature interface for emulators
- Correct usage of 68040 instruction cache
- Dead key support

- Boot delay with info screen (hold Alt key to skip boot)
- Initinfo visually improved (countdown effect and other changes)
- Hold Ctrl key at boot causes not loading the ACCs
- XHDI implemented (allows running FreeMiNT)
- Frees CPU in emulators, when not used (STOP instruction)
- Up to 16 color mode in 640x480 in Aranym
- Detect-native-features ON by default (ARAnyM, STonC, STonX)
- Keyboard fixed for XaAES
- AES icon masks fixed
- EmuCON fixed and available from EmuDesk menu
- Shutdown added to EmuDesk menu
- much enhanced Falcon VIDEL support (including boot in color)
- NVRAM works
- Better VIDEL support
- Many bug fixes and much more done

DESCRIPTION

EmuTOS is basically made up of six parts:

- The BIOS, which is the basic input output system
- The XBIOS, which provides the interface to the hardware
- The BDOS, which are the high level OS routines, what you know as GEMDOS
- The VDI, the virtual device interface - means the screen driver
- The AES, the application environment services or window manager
- The desktop, which is the graphical shell to the user

The BIOS and XBIOS code is our own development. It is really written from scratch and implements nearly all of the TOS 1.0 BIOS functionality, and a bit more, like e.g. hard disk access and STE sampled sound. A few things like printing, midi and serial stuff is missing for now, but may be implemented at some point in the future.

The GEMDOS part is based on Digital Research’s GEMDOS sources, which were made available under GPL licence in 1999 by Caldera.

The graphical parts like VDI and AES are now more or less fully implemented. They work in all the graphics modes of the original Atari ST. On some emulators EmuTOS can be patched to work with much bigger screen resolutions without any problems.

The desktop is not as nice as the original one, but is pretty usable now for a start. You are free to use a more advanced desktop replacement any time, like teradesk for example.

Since EmuTOS just implements the TOS’s functionality, you might want to use MiNT on it in order to run more modern software. EmuTOS is not an alternative to MiNT. But EmuTOS is the only free base OS to boot MiNT.

EMULATION AND FUTURE PLATFORM

EmuTOS and MiNT cooperate well. For the future we plan, that both can make use of a yet to implement standard native call interface for emulators. EmuTOS itself still uses this new standard native interface for all its supported native functions. When running EmuTOS in an emulator, this interface will provide access to use the power of the underlying OS kernel. It may allow using modern 3D graphics cards, will provide fast native file system access and will enable you to use networking with all bells and

whistles - and many things more you always dreamed of. This all will at first get possible on the Aranym platform.

This is, what EmuTOS is made for: A free OS, that can evolve. Progress has been fast up to now, because we have a small, but enthusiastic development team and are eager to see EmuTOS running with GEM and all.

HARDWARE

Making EmuTOS running natively on a new hardware platform is more or less just a question of driver support for EmuTOS. The same for MiNT, if you'd like to have it running on top of EmuTOS.

This is the currently supported Hardware:

- CPU support for m68000, m68010, m68020, m68030, m68040
- FPU detected
- Memory controller (both ST and Falcon)
- Monitor type detection (mono or not)
- WD 1772 Floppy disk controller (write track not tested)
- DMA controller
- MFP
- PSG
- ST shifter
- STE shifter (partially)
- ACIAs, IKBD protocol, mouse
- MegaST Real-Time Clock (set clock not tested)
- NVRAM (including RTC)
- DMA sound
- The native feature interface to some degree

AVAILABILITY

EmuTOS has its home at sourceforge:

    http://sourceforge.net/projects/emutos

A ready made EmuTOS image or the source can be downloaded from:

    http://sourceforge.net/project/showfiles.php?group_id=36560

It is always available in source form from our CVS server at:

    http://sourceforge.net/cvs/?group_id=36560

If you are just curious or would like to help us develop this nice little OS, you are invited to subscribe to our Mailing list for developers at:

    http://sourceforge.net/mail/?group_id=36560

We hope that you like EmuTOS. If you have any suggestions or comments, we always appreciate to hear the good and also the bad things about it.

Your EmuTOS development team.

--
written by Martin Doering
http://emutos.sourceforge.net/

Raster Music Tracker 1.1

An atari.org user has announced:

New version (1.1) of Raster Music Tracker, based on new RMT player routine with support for a lot of required (and much more other) features is out.

http://www.infos.cz/raster/atari/rmt/rmt.htm

New Version of EMUAPC Atari 8-bit Emulator

Miroslaw Koziol has announced:

New 091 version of EMUAPC the Atari 8-bit emulator is now available. All information and download page:

http://www.komires.com/

=~=~=~=

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Everyone who’s able to read this knows that there’s a lot going on in the world right now, and we’ve all got our own opinions about it. I know that _I_ have very strong opinions about it, so I figure that you do too. Okay, maybe you DON’T have very strong opinions about it, but that’s okay too. Sometimes apathy is its own reward. I don’t think that it applies in this case, but to each his own, I guess.

What I WOULD like to spend a little time talking about is a study that came out this past week which looked at the reasons behind child car seat problems. The study found that many car seats are installed improperly. The reason for this, they said, is that the directions for installation are too complicated for many parents to follow. These instructions are written, on an average, on a tenth grade reading level.

And what good is a study of this type without recommendations for improvement? Their recommendation was to "simplify" the installation instructions to a fifth grade reading level.

I’m sorry folks, but you’re only able to read at a fifth grade level, you’ve got bigger problems than a child safety seat.

Now don’t get me wrong, it’s not that I don’t think everyone should be able to have children. It’s that life is tough enough without having the skills that your environment requires. Let’s face it... in large portions of the world... and certainly in YOUR portion of the world if you’re reading this... the ability to read and comprehend is important.

Although I don’t believe that we should actively try to manipulate the gene pool to result in an increase in the cumulative IQ of the species, I DO think it’s a mistake to "dumb down". Let’s face it, no good will come from catering to the lowest common denominator.

Many of us have come to confuse not only cause and effect, but rights and privileges too. We’ve forgotten that everything comes with a price. We’ve come to believe that we "deserve" whatever we want and, I’ve got to tell ya folks, it just ain’t so.

I don’t know about you, but I feel lucky on a number of fronts. I am lucky enough to live in a place and time that I’m fairly well suited to. I’m lucky enough to have good friends, and lucky enough to actually enjoy what I’m doing most of the time.

Sure, I could complain about not being on the next-higher rung of "the ladder", about not getting everything I want, about not getting those choice parking spots in front because they’re reserved for the handicapped, or whatever other little symbols and frivolities might hit me, but the truth is that I’m damned lucky. No, I don’t have everything I want, and I probably never will. But if I had everything, what would I reach for next? That’s the stuff that theater is made of, ain’t it? "Be careful of what you wish for" has been a common theme ever since the ancient Greeks... and for good reason.

Yeah, I know. My mind is "all over the place" tonight. But I’m in a free-association kind of mood, and I doubt that anyone is really in the mood to dwell on my ramblings anyway. And ya know what? That’s okay.

Let’s get to the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
==========

Peter Slegg posts this about Porthos:

"I’ve just downloaded the newly released Porthos 3.20. You can also read a bit about it on ST-Computer.

I’ve just put quite a lot of PDF files through this version and it does display quite a lot of documents that the previous version couldn’t. Notably the font problem has gone and a lot of images that didn’t render before now do so (eg. Kingston RAM pdf’s).

I still have a few files that this version couldn’t display properly and a few pdf’s that the previous version could display but now cause Porthos problems. Also, I had some stable problems and Porthos crashed while trying to display a few files. However, I re-booted and I was able to display some of them but not all.

Overall, the display looks better and for most pdf’s don’t seem to be much slower (Milan060). Files with tables in them do seem to be slower but this is all subjective as I haven’t done timings."

Martin Tarenskeen tells Peter:

"I've just tried it to. First I was disappointed: I got a crash with an "ILLEGAL INSTRUCTION" error message. But I suspect XaAES of being responsible for that. Under N_AES it seems to work quite well. Maybe Henk Robbers is willing to take a look at it, if other XaAES users experience the same error ?"

Edward Baiz tells Martin:

"It must be the OS, because I did not experience this on my Hades under Magic."

Derryck Croker adds:

"I find that the progress reports for loading etc display only the leading ellipses, there is no text shown. Nothing amiss with the resource file that I can see."

Martin Tarenskeen now asks about a problem that plagued me for a while:

"I have a strange problem. When I was playing around with Gfa Basic I accidently created a file on my hard disk with an empty name, or maybe a name with only spaces - I can't really see. In my file selector I see an empty line and on my desktop I can see a file icon. It also has a size so it is really there. But I can not delete nor rename the file. Also I cannot delete the folder that is around it for that reason. I have tried with the standard single TOS desktop, I have tried under MiNT using bash and the rm and rmdir commands, as well as actions under THiNG - no luck. I also tried HP-optimizer's logical check to see if this would fix anything. No luck either. Does anyone have any idea how to get rid of this ghostfile ?"

John Garone tells Martin:

"If booting with ICD, use Cleanup and an oldie called Unhide may work. I hear Diskus is good if booting with HDDriver."

Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, tells Martin:

"DISKUS (http:/www.seimet.de/diskus_english.html) works with any hard disk driver. Drivers that support the SCSI Driver interface are best, however, as only these drives give you access to full functionality of DISKUS. DISKUS is available in a German version with a German manual only."

Edward adds:

"I have had this problem where I have a file that I cannot get rid of. What I did was to copy all other files to another partition and just re-initialize the partition with the bad file (using HDDriver) and then copy all the other files back. Takes awhile, but works. You could also try something like HD-Sentry (in TOS mode) and see if that helps."

Martin now tells everyone:

"I finally got rid of the file.

First I tried Kobold. Didn't work. Doesn't work very well on my system anyway, that's why I never use it anymore lately. (I keep getting these messages telling me that my computer doesn't have enough memory. But 14+32

MB should be enough, right ?)

Then I tried the DISKUS demo, which looks like a very good program. But the functions that I needed were not active in the demo version. Maybe I will buy it one of these days, my German is good enough to understand the program and it's documentation. I hear some people say "if you use HDDRIVER ...". My impression is that it has nothing to do with HDDRIVER. It is a good program even if you don't use HDDRIVER. Correct me if I'm wrong. On the other hand, a program like EDGE will give problems with modern file systems (Long filenames, big partitions) that DISKUS can handle without problems. But DISKUS can also still handle old fashioned TOS partitions, right ?

Back to my problem:

Both the file itself and the folder around the invisible file could not be deleted.

This is what I did: I moved all the normal files in the directory to another location. Then I created a new file in the directory named "X9876543.210". Then I took a disk editor (DADE, from EDGE 2), and used the "find" function to search for the string "X9876543210". After quite some waiting, this brought me to the sub-directory sector where I could identify the problematic empty file-name. I then replaced the first byte "X" of the empty filename with E5(hexadecimal) - the file was now recognized as "deleted" and I could delete the folder on my desktop again."

Ken Kosut asks about his SLM804 laser printer:

"My paper (letter - 8.5 x 11) is not advancing past the tray of the printer (paper jam error - paper is slightly advanced but still in the tray). I tried a lighter weight paper. Same error. I changed setting on tray (upper right corner) to letter size. Though I don't think it matters, because I am pretty sure I have an A4 tray. Same error.

Does anyone know why the paper is not being drawn into the printer?

Is it possible to clean a smudge off of the green drum?

(I can see the smudge on the drum, which shows up in the center of the printed page.)"

Jim DeClercq tells Ken that there are...

"Two possibilities. Paper has too high a water content, or the d-shaped pickup rollers need cleaning with a rubber cleaner-rejuvenator. I use something I got for tape deck rollers, but automotive seal sweller will work too.

As to the drum smudge, one of the things I have done to mine that has caused no problem is to wipe such stuff off with a ball of cotton.

But, where might one get a A4 tray? I could use one."

Ken replies to Jim:

"Thanks for your suggestions. I cleaned paper paths, rollers and press roller (back cover under metal spring).
I also turned felt strip over. (cleaning pad)
I tried a couple of tests. It seems to be working better, though

still jams. Not as much though.
There were a lot of rubber belts. My guess is that one or more
of these are stretched.

The drum smudge was real bad. There was some sort of debris which
put a streak right in the center of the drum.
I managed to get most of it out using cotton.
It is much better.

My tray has the following slots for the plastic divider.
B5 LTR A4 LGL

Even though I have an A4 slot, the manual says I cannot use
B5 or A4 paper.
It doesn't really say why.

Not sure where you could find a tray like this."

Ken Springer adds:

"I'm speculating here, but I wonder if it has to do with the printer driver. You move the tab to switch between legal and letter size. I wonder, if you had a European machine with appropriate drivers and language in the computer, if you did the same thing to switch between B5 and A4. Then the only difference between the printers you sold around the world would be the voltage power supplies."

Christian Potzinger asks about making ST diskettes on a PC:

"Is it possible to read/write ST-Diskettes with the PC?
And if not, what is needed to get Images to a Diskette,
which a real 520ST can read?"

Matthias Arndt tells Christian:

"It is entirely possible.

http://home.tu-clausthal.de/~ifmar/makedisk/ for a tutorial."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

=~=~=~=

->In This Week's Gaming Section - Toying With Sega?!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" EA, Nintendo Team Up!
Award Show for Games??
And much more!

=~=~=~=

Toying With Sega

Is video game maker Sega in play? From bowing out of the platform business two years ago to last week's announcement of layoffs, the last couple of years have held perpetual retrenchment for the Japanese gaming specialist. Now, two stateside suitors are rumored to be interested in a buyout.

Microsoft and Electronic Arts have been linked to most of the recent buyouts in the video game sector. The reasons are simple. Microsoft would love to lock in hot titles and leave Nintendo as a distant and fading third-place finisher in the hardware wars, and Electronic Arts is the industry leader with an acquisitive past. They are big names, and they fan the rumors, in large part, because they're the only two well-funded players with a vested interested in getting bigger.

Sega denied the rumors Monday morning. The company is working on its own growth plan, which involves merging with a pachinko company. However, Sega better not take too long to gauge any potential interest. Vivendi still needs to unload some assets, and other game specialists, like THQ, Take-Two Interactive, and Activision, are trading at levels accretive to earnings for both of the two tagged titans.

It's a shame that so few companies appear to be in a buyout state of mind. Industry consolidation at a time when the hardware makers are ready to chop another $50 off their consoles should help grow the installed base of gamers. While Sony's PlayStation 2 is doing well, software companies' reluctance to support Xbox and GameCube will dry up the demand for either system if fresh titles don't continue.

So, why shouldn't the hardware makers gobble up the software houses? The rivals are cheap, and in some cases, cash rich. The industry shakeout may not be pretty, but at least the public will know which platforms are worth buying.

Microsoft's Xbox Live Adds Customers

Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox video-game business is bleeding hundreds of millions of dollars. Its boasts of late have been along the uninspiring lines of "We're Number 2!" in sales of its game consoles.

But Xbox Live, Microsoft's online video-game service, has surpassed expectations with 350,000 subscribers signed up just three months after launch. And the rapid increase has helped the company break new ground in the industry, a coup that has competitors on the defensive, analysts say.

"The success of Xbox Live has caught everyone by surprise, including Microsoft," said Matt Rosoff, an analyst with Directions on Microsoft, a Kirkland, Wash.-based independent research firm that specializes in Microsoft.

It is putting pressure on Sony Computer Entertainment’s PlayStation, said Charlene Li, principal analyst with Forrester Research, as well as Nintendo, which lags even further behind Sony in its online offerings.

Microsoft’s foray into online gaming has not been cheap.

The company loses money on every Xbox console it sells. At $199 a unit - already $100 less than its debut price in November 2001 - the consoles may soon drop in price even more, some analysts said.

The losses only deepened with Microsoft’s new Xbox Live service, which connects gamers around the world who have a broadband Internet connection and subscribe to the service. For $49 - the price of a popular console video game - customers receive a headset to talk with one another as well as a year’s subscription. The company doesn’t disclose how much it spends on Xbox Live, but said last year it will spend $2 billion through 2007 on the Xbox and Xbox Live ventures.

Microsoft rolled out the service in North America last November, then in Japan in January. It launches in Europe next week.

The Xbox crew’s challenge now as it seeks more customers is to appeal to people who are not hard-core gamers - with games that are big hits. Microsoft has fewer titles available for Xbox than Sony does for its $199 PlayStation2.

Scott Henson, Xbox director of platform strategy, declined to comment on rumors Microsoft is looking to acquire video game publisher Sega Corp. But he did say that Sega’s sports games are among the most popular for Xbox Live.

Microsoft’s ability to sign up 350,000 subscribers - and its message that Xbox Live is synonymous with the "next-generation" entertainment platform - is already getting noticed by competitors, Rosoff said.

He noted that Sony is already responding, increasingly talking about the next console it will deliver, PlayStation3, due out in 2005.

"They don’t want consumers to start viewing Playstation2 as an old-fashioned or legacy device," he said. "Sony’s trying to change the conversation."

Sony PlayStation2 sales still dwarf Microsoft’s, with analysts estimating more than 50 million units sold around the world since the October 2000 launch.

Microsoft has reported console sales of about 9 million since November 2001. Nintendo figures from last September showed sales of 6.7 million GameCube consoles - although it projects sales near 10 million by March.

Sony and Nintendo say they are planning to expand their online offerings but declined to offer specifics.

The two already sell adapters that can connect their consoles to the Internet for online play - Sony reports about 500,000 sold; Nintendo did not immediately make sales totals available.

But neither company has made as significant an investment in building out an integrated platform for online gamers as Microsoft has, said Michael Gartenberg, research director for Jupiter Research.

Part of it is by design.

Sony doesn’t host online games for its users, opting instead to let game developers decide how they offer games for PlayStation2 users, said Molly Smith spokeswoman.

But the lack of a central network is a disadvantage in some ways. For example, players who want to keep the same nickname across games can’t - a vulnerability Sony may be recognizing, Rosoff said.

And as the big three experiment, the competition will hit high-gear in the next generation of consoles and games, she said.

For now, Nintendo appears to be the prime target for Microsoft, Rosoff said.

Nintendo GameCube players can connect to only one online game. But the company is not looking to massively expand its online offerings, said Perrin Kaplan, vice president of marketing and corporate affairs for Nintendo of America.

The company is keeping an eye on online possibilities but doesn’t see enough homes connecting over broadband or enough of a mass consumer opportunity to make it worthwhile, she said.

"Quality software and great games and innovation - that remains the challenge for everyone," said Kaplan. "Technology is one thing, but having the games is another."

And although Microsoft may have narrowly overtaken Nintendo in console sales, it faces a tougher fight ahead with Sony, the far more dominant player.

"Sony has made it clear that they are going to cede nothing to Microsoft," Gartenberg said. "It’s just that Microsoft is ahead at this point."

EA, Nintendo Extend Tie-Up, Includes Sports Games

Video game publisher Electronic Arts Inc. and Japanese game company Nintendo Co. Ltd. on Thursday said they would co-develop a number of games, including sports titles for Nintendo’s GameCube that EA had one considered abandoning.

Nintendo has been working to boost the GameCube from its third-place position in the U.S. market in the face of weak sales during the holiday season, particularly for some sports titles.

That performance in sports led a number of companies, including Electronic Arts and Sega Corp., to say they would consider abandoning sports games for the platform.

But EA and Nintendo said Thursday they would work together on a broad range titles, with EA developing the games with input from Shigeru Miyamoto, the legendary game designer responsible for Nintendo’s flagship "Mario" franchise.

EA will release 20 GameCube games over the next 12 months, Nintendo said, and will work to develop game features that connect the GameCube with the handheld Game Boy Advance. That connectivity, which allows data and game features to be transferred between the two devices, has been a major selling point for Nintendo but adopted by few developers as yet.

Nintendo said the first EA games to support that feature will be this year's "Madden NFL 2004," "FIFA 2004" and "Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004," three of EA's most popular and most successful sports games.

Site Returns After Piracy Crackdown

A public Internet site that offered information on the underground software piracy scene was back online Thursday, only days after it was "seized" by the Department of Justice.

Even as the DOJ trumpeted its seizure of the ISONews.com Web site on Wednesday, however, the actual Web site content was still available online. That suggests the government took control of the ISONews.com domain name, without seizing the actual servers where the Web site content resided.

Now, the ISONews.com site has reappeared at a new domain, stolemy.com, registered to a Tim Dorr.

The DOJ did not respond to a request for comment.

The site appears to be identical to the original ISONews.com site, with visitors participating actively in the online discussion groups devoted to various aspects of software piracy.

One especially active discussion thread, entitled "US DoJ vs. ISONEWS," contained over 400 messages posted between Wednesday and Friday afternoon.

The discussion thread chronicled the dawning awareness among ISONews devotees that the U.S. government had taken over the site's domain name, www.ISONews.com.

At first, members speculated whether the site, which was modified to display a warning from the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Customs Service, had been hacked or whether the site's owners were playing a joke.

An expected delay in propagating the DOJ's change out to domain name servers (DNS) across the Internet meant that many users did not see the government's message even as late as Friday, adding to the confusion.

While many members waited for a further government clampdown and said their farewells to the site, other ISONews.com members proposed moving the site.

A post by an ISONews.com member named Uncle_Mart suggested that David Rocci, also known as "krazy8", the Blacksburg, Virginia, resident whose arrest and subsequent plea agreement with the government led to the seizure of the ISONews.com domain, was not the site's actual owner.

Another message in the thread by a user named "horrordee" proposed backing up the servers on which the site content resided and moving them to a new location outside the United States.

While the site continued without a domain name, ISONews.com members appeared to use a variety of Internet Relay Chat channels to communicate and, by Friday, the site was again available online.

The resilience of the ISONews.com site points to some of the problems facing law enforcement as they try to crack down on illegal activity on the Internet, according to one security expert.

"The domain name system decouples ownership of the domain name from ownership of the server. There are even domain name services offshore that people can use (to) quickly point to new sites as a server gets shut down," said Chris Wysopal, director of research and development at the security consulting company @stake.

Whereas online businesses conducting illicit trade can be shut down - their servers seized and bank accounts frozen--the job becomes more difficult when the commodity is information and ideas, according to Wysopal.

"If it’s just information, people can just back up the site or have a mirror of it. It’s extremely difficult to eradicate all remnants of a Web site when people want to keep that information available. I would say it’s really impossible given the various jurisdictions overseas - you can almost always stay one step ahead (of law enforcement) and move from country to country," Wysopal said.

While it may be embarrassing, the U.S. government should probably move on and not become overly invested in tracking down the ISONews.com site, he said.

"It’s a very difficult problem. You can shut down people who are selling illegal access devices. But when you’re trying to get people to stop talking about illegal activity, you’re going to be spending a lot of energy and not getting anywhere," he said.

’Metroid Prime’ Takes Another Top Game Honor

A video game about a female action hero in space took top honors at a video game awards show Thursday night, one voted on not by game publishers or marketers but by game developers themselves.

"Metroid Prime," developed by Retro Studios on behalf of Nintendo Co. Ltd. for the company’s GameCube console, was voted "Game of the Year" at the Game Developers Choice Awards, presented before a near-capacity crowd at the San Jose Civic Auditorium.

Retro also took "Rookie of the Year" honors in the awards handed out by the Independent Game Developers Association, while the "Metroid Team" at Retro that designed the game was honored for "Excellence in Level Design."

A number of video game enthusiast magazines and Web sites voted "Metroid Prime" as 2002’s top game, but it was nearly shut out at the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences award show in Las Vegas last week.

The game that beat "Metroid" for Game of the Year honors at the AIAS awards, Electronic Arts Inc.’s "Battlefield 1942," took one award, for "Excellence in Game Design."

The main awards show was preceded by the awards for the Independent Game Festival, which honors games produced without the support of a mainstream publisher.

Of the 73 games in the festival, organizers said, a third were done on no budget at all.

One game, "Wild Earth," from Super X Studios, dominated the competition, winning for innovation in game design and innovation in visual arts and also taking the $15,000 Seumas McNally Grand Prize.

In accepting the grand prize award, the game’s developer thanked his parents for their financial support.

U.S. Cable Games Network Announces New Awards Show

As the video game business sidles up closer to Hollywood, it was only a matter of time before the industry picked up another Tinseltown tradition: a proliferation of awards shows.

G4, a cable channel devoted to video games, on Monday said it would launch the network’s first annual "Glow Awards" in July for the best games and characters of the year.

The July 30 show, to be held in Hollywood, will also feature musical acts, celebrity interviews and interactive game stations, the network said.

Last week the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences held its sixth annual game awards in Las Vegas, and cable network TNN has said it will produce its own game awards show as well.

G4, launched in April last year and available in 9 million homes nationwide, is owned by Comcast Corp.

Video game hardware and software sales surpassed $10 billion in the United States in 2002, putting it on par with Hollywood’s domestic box office receipts.

G4 said its Glow Award nominees would be announced at the industry’s annual Electronic Entertainment Expo, or E3, this May in Los Angeles.

=~=~=~=

A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

High Court Considers Library Porn Filters

The Supreme Court considered on Wednesday whether library patrons should be

able to surf the Internet without government-ordered pornography filters.

Justices will decide before July if Congress can require public libraries to install software to filter out pornography as a condition of receiving federal money.

The case pits free speech rights against the government’s ability to protect the public from the seamy side of the Internet.

Solicitor General Theodore Olson argued that libraries don’t have X-rated movies and magazines on their shelves and shouldn’t have to offer access to pornography on their computers.

"The First Amendment does not require libraries to sponsor the viewing of pornography," Olson said.

Librarians and civil liberties groups contend that filters are censorship and that they block a vast amount of valuable information along with the pornography.

Paul Smith, an attorney for the American Library Association, told justices that with 11 million Web sites, it’s impossible for filter operators to keep up with pornographic sites.

Some justices seemed skeptical of the challenge to the Children’s Internet Protection Act.

"What is the great burden on speech?" asked Justice Stephen Breyer.

Breyer said that Web surfers can ask librarians to disable filters to get to a particular site. "You can have it, you just have to go up to the front desk to get it," he said.

But Smith countered that it stigmatizes a person doing legitimate research. "You’ve got to go up and say ‘Please turn off the porn filter.’"

Justice Sandra Day O’Connor compared the interruptions to the waits required in doing traditional research, asking a librarian to find a certain book.

More than 14 million people use public library computers to do research, send and receive e-mail, and, in some cases, log onto adult sites.

A three-judge federal panel in Pennsylvania ruled last year that the library law violates the First Amendment because the filtering programs block too much nonpornographic material. The law has been on hold since Congress passed it in 2000.

The law governs money from two programs Congress had previously approved to help libraries take advantage of the Internet. The programs have provided libraries about $1 billion since 1999, including tax money and telecommunications industry fees.

Opponents of the law argue it’s particularly unfair to lower income people who cannot afford their own home connections and those in rural areas where Internet access may be expensive or difficult to get.

The lower court judges had recommended less restrictive ways to control Internet use, such as requiring parental consent before minors are allowed to log in on an unfiltered computer or having a parent monitor a child’s

Web use.

Congress has passed three child protection laws since 1996, but the Supreme Court struck down the first and blocked the second from taking effect. Those dealt with regulations on Web site operators. Legislators tried a new approach with the 2000 law, arguing that Congress should be able to regulate government property.

An estimated 17 percent of libraries already use filtering software on at least some of their computers, with varying degrees of success in screening out only objectionable material.

The case is United States v. American Library Association, 02-361.

Judges Attack Online Child Porn Crackdown

Two federal judges have dealt a potentially crippling blow to a nationwide Internet child pornography crackdown, saying the FBI recklessly misled judges to get search warrants that were used in making more than 100 arrests.

Constitutional safeguards cannot be relaxed just because "the crimes are repugnant," said U.S. District Judge Denny Chin in New York as he dismissed evidence obtained against one defendant. Chin’s ruling, dated Wednesday, was released publicly Thursday.

U.S. District Judge Catherine Perry in St. Louis, throwing out evidence against another defendant Thursday, said "false information was recklessly included in the search warrant application."

The judges each cited constitutional flaws in the investigation, dubbed "Operation Candyman," and they noted that the FBI and prosecutors have acknowledged making errors.

The rulings could affect dozens of defendants in the crackdown announced by Attorney General John Ashcroft a year ago. Police officers, clergy members and an Army sergeant were among those arrested.

Chin called the intrusion of privacy by the government "potentially enormous."

"Thousands of individuals would be subject to search, their homes invaded and their property seized, in one fell swoop, even though their only activity consisted of entering an e-mail address into a Web site from a computer located in the confines of their own homes," he wrote.

Defense lawyers said both judges considered new evidence that demonstrates the FBI recklessly used erroneous information in its search warrant applications. Nearly identical applications were used in cases across the country.

"It’s significant," St. Louis lawyer Daniel Juengel said of the rulings, including one dismissing evidence against his client. "The government can’t just come in and search your house based on something you may have inadvertently clicked on in your computer."

Michael Kulstad, a spokesman for federal prosecutors in New York, said

Chin’s ruling was being reviewed and prosecutors had not decided whether to appeal. An FBI spokesman did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

The FBI effort targeted members of Internet discussion groups on Yahoo! Inc.’s Web site, including one called "Candyman." Authorities used e-mail addresses to track down users.

Attorney Nicole P. Armenta, who represented the defendant in the New York case, credited Juengel with first challenging the warrants on grounds that the FBI misled judges to believe that people who tapped into the "Candyman" site automatically received child pornography.

"A lot of what went on in the Candyman site was constitutionally protected," she said. The site is no longer in operation.

Both judges agreed those entering the Web site could choose not to receive e-mails containing pornographic photographs. And both criticized a former FBI agent who once led the probe, saying he misrepresented the true workings of the Web site when he insisted that everyone who joined would receive child porn.

"Here there was more than a mere failure to investigate or an innocent or negligent mistake," Chin wrote.

The vast majority of subscribers to the site between December 2000 and Feb. 6, 2001 elected to receive no e-mails, Chin said.

Chin said the danger of unreasonable intrusions into the home "is great" when law enforcement gathers information on the Internet.

In a 59-page decision, Chin acknowledged that law enforcement needs some latitude to catch those who break child pornography laws on the Internet and sexually exploit and abuse children.

But he added, "Just as there is no higher standard of probable cause when First Amendment values are implicated ... there is no lower standard when the crimes are repugnant and the suspects frustratingly difficult to detect."

In her ruling, Perry said the government’s argument that subscribing to the "Candyman" Web site established probable cause of possessing child pornography was like "saying if someone subscribes to a drug legalization organization or newsletter, then there is probable cause to believe that person possesses drugs."

Online Porn Law Ruled Unconstitutional

A U.S. federal appeals court has ruled that a law seeking to protect children from online pornography was not constitutionally sound because it limits Web publishers’ free speech.

The ruling, made by a three-judge panel of the 3rd U.S. Court of Appeals in Philadelphia Thursday, upholds an injunction against the Child Online Protection Act (COPA), which has not been enforced since it was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in late 1998.

COPA makes it illegal for Web publishers to post sexually explicit material

or content deemed harmful to minors without limiting the site to adults - by asking for a credit card number, for example.

Opponents argue, however, that the law restricts adults' constitutionally protected free speech and does not set adequate standards by which to judge if material is "harmful" to minors.

The appeals court agreed.

In its ruling, the court said that the law "contains a number of provisions that are constitutionally infirm." It went on to state that COPA is not narrowly tailored enough to serve its interest of protecting minors from explicit and harmful material.

"Once again the court has ruled in our favor and struck down a law that goes far beyond restricting pornography," said Ann Beeson, an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union, which initiated the legal challenge.

The 3rd Circuit Court had issued the original injunction, saying that it is unconstitutional to judge the legality of Internet content by "contemporary community standards." However, when the government appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, the justices ruled that COPA was not unconstitutional on evaluation standards alone and kicked it back down to the appeals court for further review.

Beeson applauded the appellate court's upholding of the injunction Friday, saying that COPA is "another attempt by Congress to criminalize speech that is valuable for adults on the Internet."

The ACLU is representing Web publishers such as online magazine Salon.com, safe sex site Condomania.com, and gay community site PlanetOut.com, Beeson added.

The government now has a choice to again appeal the case, and Beeson said she believes it will probably do so.

No one from the U.S. Department of Justice, which is defending the law, was immediately available to comment on the ruling Friday.

AOL Claims Record Block of Spam E-Mails

In a single 24-hour period on Monday and Tuesday, America Online says it trashed a billion e-mails offering mortgages and organ enhancement, instead of letting them slip into customers' inboxes.

AOL spokesman Nicholas Graham said the company's software filters snagged the record number of junk, or spam, messages.

AOL said its members used "report spam" buttons on their e-mail software 5.5 million times in the period. The largest portion of messages reported - about 10 percent - came from users of Microsoft's Hotmail e-mail service, Graham said.

AOL said it blocks an average of 28 junk e-mails per account, per day.

Graham said "an extremely small fraction" of the messages snagged in AOL's spam filters were legitimate ones. He declined to reveal any figures for

that mail.

PayPal Users Hit With Another Scam

Another Internet scam that targets online shoppers who use the EBay PayPal payment service is circulating, according to reports from those who have received the suspicious e-mail and to messages posted to online discussion groups.

PayPal did not respond to requests for comment.

The e-mail appears to come from "info@paypal.com" and has a subject line that reads "Your PayPal account is Limited." The body of the message reads, in part: "PayPal is currently performing regular maintenance of our security measures. Your account has been randomly selected for this maintenance, and placed on Limited Access status."

Recipients are asked to provide their PayPal account information, credit card number, and bank account number using a form in the body of the e-mail message. A button is provided to "log in" to PayPal's site and update the information.

The message is designed to look like it was generated by PayPal, using graphics from the PayPal Web site as well as fonts and colors similar to legitimate PayPal correspondence. A boilerplate statement about receiving notifications is even supplied at the end of the message, with links to PayPal that allow the recipient to modify their notification preferences.

"It was formatted really nicely. It had the right colors for the PayPal site and there weren't any obvious grammar mistakes," said Karawynn Long, a writer and Web designer in Seattle who received one of the apparent scam e-mail messages. Long was almost fooled by the message into entering her account information.

"The subject of the e-mail was odd. But it was early in the morning. Pre-coffee," Long said.

Suspicious of being asked for her confidential account information, however, Long used her e-mail program to view the message's HTML source code. Her search revealed that information submitted using the form would go to a host server with a domain name ending in.ru, the domain suffix for Russia, according to Long.

"When I viewed the source I could see [the scam], but how many people view the source on their e-mail?" Long said.

Scams targeting PayPal are common, according to Matt Sergeant, senior antispam technologist at MessageLabs in Gloucester, England.

"They were one of the first Internet banks, and they have an awful lot of customers," Sergeant said.

That means that spammers who blanket the Internet with millions of scam e-mail messages are likely to catch quite a few PayPal customers in their net, according to Sergeant. Still, this most recent message's professional appearance and careful attention to detail are not the norm, Sergeant said.

"What you have there really is the top tier of intelligence as far as spammers go. Most spammers are pretty stupid and easy to spot," Sergeant said.

Users who receive such an e-mail should contact PayPal to report the scam.

PayPal customers who have been defrauded should report the theft to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Sergeant said.

McAfee Readies Enhanced Antivirus Offering

Antivirus software maker McAfee Inc. is expected to make a major enhancement to its VirusScan software in the first week of March. The new version, Enterprise 7.0, will include a worm-killing feature - the company says the worm killer will scan memory on demand for worms and Trojans as well as for viruses - and will kill malicious activity.

While not entirely new, memory-resident worms such as Code Red and Slammer seem to be becoming more popular among virus writers, and more virulent. Slammer nearly saturated its potential targets in 10 minutes, by some estimates. "When you're talking about something that fast, there's no way any vendor can push a signature out fast enough to stop it," says Eric Hemmendinger, research director of information security for Aberdeen Group.

McAfee says Enterprise 7.0 users also will be able to profile which types of processes get scanned for viruses, based on risk. For instance, automated backups may not be scanned for viruses while E-mail would always be scanned for potentially malicious software.

Pricing wasn't immediately available. VirusScan Enterprise 7.0 will be available in early March.

Users Get a Second Sneak Peek at Longhorn

A second build of the successor to Microsoft's Windows XP appeared on the Internet late last week but Windows watchers who tested the software don't see major advances to get excited about yet.

When it hits the stores at the end of 2004 or in 2005, the software, code-named Longhorn, should be one of the most important new releases of Windows that the company has ever put out. A big change will be the new Windows Future Storage (WinFS) file system, based on SQL Server technology and designed to give users a direct route to data, making the physical location of a file irrelevant.

The new file system wasn't part of Longhorn build 3683 that surfaced in November and neither is it part of the latest leaked version, build 4008. The new build shows mostly evolutionary, not revolutionary improvements over the earlier build, according to Windows experts including testers with BetaNews and Paul Thurrott's SuperSite for Windows.

WinFS replaces the NTFS and FAT32 file systems used in current Windows versions. Before appearing in Longhorn, WinFS technology is expected to premiere in a new version of Microsoft's SQL Server database, code-named

Yukon, due later this year.

Bits of WinFS functionality, however, are in build 4008, and can be seen for example when browsing media files. Instead of displaying the contents of specific folders or directories, such as "My Music" or "My Images," Longhorn lets users view files indexed from various physical locations, the testers report. The search feature has also been simplified.

Although all testers mentioned the emerging WinFS functionality, they are more impressed by the improved setup utility and procedure for the software. Installation is handled by the new Windows Preinstallation Environment, a small operating system that is loaded into the RAM of a PC. Longhorn installs without user interaction in about 20 minutes, a big improvement over current Windows versions, which takes about an hour to install.

Also apparent in Longhorn is Microsoft’s multimedia push. The latest leaked alpha version has an incomplete "My TV" application, deeply integrated media player, and support for creating photo albums, akin to Apple Computer’s iPhoto, testers reported.

The missing file system is only part of the unfinished work on Longhorn. Another part is the user interface, which is expected to be 3D and video-based.

Testers agree that the final version of Longhorn will look very different from build 4008. That is also why Microsoft, which confirmed the authenticity of the leaked Longhorn build, won’t talk about the product.

"The technology at this stage in no way represents what the final version of the product will be. The release is still far away," said a spokesperson for Microsoft, based in Redmond, Washington.

Feds Seize Internet Domain Names

Federal agents routinely seize property allegedly used in the commission of a crime, anything from a drug dealer’s car or speedboat to a hacker’s computer.

In a series of raids in recent weeks, the Justice Department has extended such grabs to property that might seem esoteric but worry civil libertarians - Internet domain names.

In one case, the government took over Web sites that it said peddled bongs, roach clips, rolling papers and other paraphernalia used in the consumption of illegal drugs.

Prosecutors also acquired, in a plea agreement, a site called isonews.com whose owner was charged with selling special chips that let pirated titles run on videogame consoles.

In the past, Web sites simply vanished after the computer servers that hosted them landed in police property rooms. But in the recent cases, the sites remained alive, greeting visitors with stern warnings from government agencies.

The trend is alarming online civil liberties groups and legal scholars, who

say the government's new tactic risks depriving people of valuable property - their Internet storefronts and thus their livelihoods - as electronic commerce becomes more common.

"If you want to take down a Web site but simply confiscate the servers, operators can always buy other servers," said Michael Overly, an attorney specializing in computer law at Foley & Lardner. "But if they take the domain name away, then they've put the person out of business."

Critics of the Justice Department's recent moves also say they fear the government could use the new method to spy on Web surfers who visit confiscated sites.

"The government is suddenly in a position of being able to monitor the Web-surfing activities of unwitting individuals who believe they are going to a Web site ... but possibly implicating themselves into some law enforcement investigation," said David Sobel, general counsel of the Electronic Privacy Information Center.

Visitors to pipesforyou.com, aheadcase.com and others are now greeted with a message informing them that a Pennsylvania federal court has "restrained" the sites at the request of the Drug Enforcement Administration.

In announcing the indictment last week of 55 people for allegedly selling drug paraphernalia on the Internet, Attorney General John Ashcroft said several sites had been redirected to DEA servers and that prosecutors had asked the court to redirect another "15 to 20 sites within the next 30 days."

The Justice Department did not return repeated phone calls seeking comment on what it plans to do with the sites and their visitor logs.

A DEA spokeswoman, Tara DeGarmo, noted that the domain names in the head shop case were "retained" but not seized pending the outcome of the criminal cases. She referred questions to federal prosecutors, who did not return calls.

That leaves privacy activists guessing.

"You can spin this out to future situations where there are a lot of classes of individuals the government might like to have a list of," such as visitors to terrorism- or biological weapons-related sites, Sobel said.

On the Internet, Web surfers are identified with a unique number, or Internet Protocol address. Devices on the Internet need such an address to send and receive Web, e-mail and other traffic.

Domain names are the Web's equivalent of the front door of a bricks-and-mortar business. But while businesses can physically relocate in the material world, in cyberspace they depend on their domain name. The physical location of the Web site is immaterial.

Among issues that remain unresolved in the courts is whether a domain name constitutes property, or a contract the owner has with the domain name registrar - the company that provided the name. If the former, a domain name could indeed be seized like a car, house or computer.

In the past, domain name registrars have sued to ensure that their offerings are not considered property. Otherwise, Overly said, "they would find themselves at the heart of no end of litigation."

The registrars involved in the head shop investigation either declined to comment or did not return telephone calls.

Domain transfers have in the past occurred as a result of criminal or civil cases, but Overly said the courts would ultimately decide the issue.

"The government has done many things over the years," he said, "that ultimately turn out not to be legal."

Embattled Net Exec Says Lawsuit Good for Business

The head of an online file-sharing network said on Tuesday that lawsuits by major record labels seeking to shut it down helped raise its profile and attract millions of users and big-name advertisers.

Grokster is one of three file-sharing services being sued by major music labels and Hollywood. Media executives have decried these outfits as "piratical bazaars," claiming they allow consumers to trade all manners of copyright-protected materials for free, a phenomenon blamed for declining music sales.

The music and film industry's high profile crusade against such services has been good for business, Grokster president Wayne Rosso told attendees of the FT New Media and Broadcasting Conference in London.

"Grokster has more than 10 million unique users worldwide every month accessing the network," said Rosso. "That's a pretty big window of opportunity to market goods and services to a highly desirable affluent mass audience."

According to Rosso, Grokster advertisers include: the U.S. Air Force, AT&T Wireless, Dell Computer and French cosmetics firm L'Oreal's Lancome brand. He told Reuters the surge of interest by advertisers has helped Grokster return a profit, though he declined to disclose figures.

"Every time they attack file-sharing software in any way, users rush to download the program, just to see what's going on, and become hooked. As a result, we prosper and revenues grow," Rosso said.

Grokster and its rivals Kazaa and Morpheus have begun to cash in on their enormous user base selling advertising space to companies pitching products ranging from anti-virus software to mobile phone contracts.

Rosso told Reuters that the number of companies seeking to do business with Grokster is surging even as the Grokster faces the prospect of being sued out of existence.

Grokster and its rival file-sharing networks have been vilified by the media establishment who accuse them of facilitating rampant unauthorized trade of film, music, software and video games.

The music and film industry are seeking a ruling from a Los Angeles Federal Court to have Grokster, Kazaa and Morpheus shut down. In 2000, the music labels succeeded in bringing a U.S. federal court injunction against Napster, the original song-swapping service, that ultimately led to its demise.

Rosso declared during the rare public address opportunity that "We are not pirates."

Industry-sanctioned download services, including Pressplay and MusicNet, which are owned jointly by the major labels, face different complications.

Music labels Warner Music, EMI, Bertelsmann's BMG, Universal Music and Sony Music have released a relatively small portion of their repertoire to select legitimate online services, slowing customer uptake.

Rosso, an unlikely champion of the subscription model, said the success of online music distribution hinges on charging consumers for music downloads.

The consumer, he said, will subscribe to download services as long as they are reasonably priced, the music selection is expanded - two common criticisms of the industry-backed services MusicNet and Pressplay - and the downloads are secure and virus-free.

Rosso urged the labels and music publishers to license more of their music to more online services if they want to exploit this new market.

"By withholding Internet licenses, the recording industry is single-handedly stunting the growth of e-commerce."

Rosso also revealed a profile of Grokster users, shattering the conception that file-sharing is an activity made up primarily of teenagers and college students.

Citing a recent study Grokster had commissioned of its service, Rosso said 71 percent of users are between the ages of 25 and 54, the average household income is $55,400 and 53 percent have a college degree.

What Makes eBay Invincible

EBay is - still - sitting pretty. According to Forrester Research, the company booked US$15 billion in sales in 2002, far eclipsing Amazon's $4 billion. Its stock, though not unaffected by the dot-com crash, has not been decimated like countless other high-flying issues. In fact, eBay enjoys a market capitalization of $24 billion, and its shares recently reached a new 52-week high.

Most importantly, the company's business model has proven its worth and continues to thrive even as eBay's management explores new avenues. What are the building blocks of the auction giant's extraordinary and persistent success?

The obvious answer is that eBay's first-mover advantage allowed it to dominate the online auction space. The so-called "network effect" has bred a critical mass of customers, a group divided into buyers and sellers. If the market were fragmented among several online auction companies, as it once seemed on the verge of becoming, eBay would not reap such hefty revenues.

But this snapshot explanation does not illuminate the full picture. In fact, Kevin Pursglove, eBay's senior director of communications, questions the first-mover theory. "When we started, a half-dozen companies were

offering something similar on the Internet," he told the E-Commerce Times. "The fact remains that you've got to have a good company and a good service."

For his part, Morningstar stock analyst David Kathman told the E-Commerce Times that eBay is a superior operating company that was in the right place, with the best idea, at the right time. He downplayed the significance of early players in the online auction space. "EBay was the first at their particular business: conducting auctions with no inventory. Other companies were involved in buying inventory and auctioning it off, but that's a totally different business model."

At any rate, whether through first-mover momentum or superior service, eBay has capitalized on the network effect to a greater extent than any other e-commerce company. "It is the single most important factor in eBay's success," Andrew Bartels, research leader at Giga Information Group, told the E-Commerce Times.

In a nutshell, eBay's critical mass of customers creates an ever-expanding sphere of influence resembling a magnetic field. Large and small merchants gravitate to eBay because that is where buyers are clustered. Consumers flock there because of the great product selection. The result is a juggernaut that has vanquished latecomers, such as Yahoo! Auctions and Amazon Auctions. Both of those operations are still in business, but they have reduced expectations and make relatively small contributions to their parent companies' balance sheets.

Inventory - or, more precisely, the lack of it - is another key to eBay's success. The company's core auction business has no inventory, since its customers supply the product. This simplification of eBay's role - the company merely provides virtual space and software tools - widens its operating margins, leaving its balance sheet unencumbered by warehousing and fulfillment costs.

With no inventory headaches, company management is free to focus on site operation and software management. The tools supplied to eBay's merchants enhance this value proposition. "EBay makes the pricing model attractive," said Giga's Bartels. "They create tools that enable sellers to use the eBay platform effectively."

A crucial point that is often overlooked is eBay's value as a customer acquisition tool for small merchants. "This is a key contributor to eBay's value," Kent Allen, research director at Aberdeen Group, told the E-Commerce Times. "Small merchants are willing to sell at a loss on eBay in order to capture new customers."

Although this phenomenon is primarily a small-business dynamic, even large businesses get into the act when disposing of excess inventory. Using eBay as a liquidation channel can be far less expensive than using a traditional liquidator. "Companies lose money just by placing the call to a traditional liquidator," said Allen, who authored an Aberdeen research paper on dumping excess inventory through eBay and AOL.

Such corporate leveraging of eBay's platform adds value to the customer experience as well, as increasingly brand-disloyal buyers seek bargains wherever they can find them. So the network effect continues to grow.

Reigning as an industry's lone superpower sounds peachy, but maintaining that lead is no picnic. Two priorities dominate eBay's operational strategy: keeping its buyer/seller community happy, and keeping its massive

Web site up and running.

From the start, eBay has been, first and foremost, a community. To this day, the company maintains a high degree of communication with its customers via posted bulletins, interactive message boards and the unusual accessibility of its top-level executives. Everyone knows Meg Whitman, eBay's CEO, as Meg.

At the same time, software tools automatically regulate trust in the community. The company's feedback system, which at one time was vulnerable to tampering, has been tightened and serves as a self-regulating mechanism that keeps eBay's marketplace integrity high. "The company is executing well on its community tools," Kathman confirmed.

This is not to say an Ozzie-and-Harriet feeling holds sway at all times. Complaints light up eBay's discussion boards continually, as might be expected in any enormous community. In fact, Aberdeen's Allen said eBay's difficulty in maintaining peace in its huge household could breed trouble down the road.

"If there's a crack in the wall, it would be that some small companies feel they get roughed up a little," Allen noted. He cited instances when eBay made off-site communication between sellers and buyers difficult in an attempt to thwart the so-called "eBay gray market," through which small merchants acquire customers on eBay but transact their business privately.

EBay's second main business priority - keeping the site up and running - was galvanized in the summer of 1999, when a catastrophic systems failure blacked out the entire auction site for 22 hours. The company lost millions in transaction fees and billions in market value as investors dumped shares.

Two results of the Big Crash remain paramount to this day: first, eBay's realization that remaining "up" on a 24/7 basis is a mission-critical business imperative; and second, the hiring of Maynard Webb as CIO. Plucked from Gateway, Webb is widely considered to have been eBay's white knight in the time of its greatest need, the man who fortified the site's stability.

Every analyst consulted for this story acknowledged Webb's crucial role in eBay's evolution, but they all pointed to the first lesson as a more meaningful one. "The most important fact is that [eBay] understood the importance of staying open 24/7," said Giga's Bartels. "They dealt effectively with the 1999 outage by developing redundancy and hot backups."

Average unscheduled downtime at eBay is now mere seconds per month. As Yankee Group analyst Adi Kishore told the E-Commerce Times, "The whole industry learned from eBay's events.... Standard uptime for sites has become much higher than in the past."

When assessing eBay's dominance, the company's role in building out certain product categories also should not be underestimated. Naturally, the auction giant must follow its sellers to some extent in determining its product directory. EBay did not invent Beanie Babies, for example, though it enabled a brisk business in trafficking them.

This means that when eBay notices a swell of activity in a previously overlooked category, it works to promote it. The best current example is eBay Motors, which Pursglove said brought in $3 billion in 2002. Home electronics ($2.2 billion), home appliances and furniture ($1.4 billion), and baby merchandise (50 percent growth in 2002 over 2001) also have grown

robustly, thanks to the company’s stewardship.

Pursglove noted that eBay is transacting business at a rate that represents only about 3 percent of the capacity of its 18,000 categories. So there is plenty of room to grow - especially beyond U.S. borders.

Indeed, globalization has played a big part in eBay’s recent success and will remain a vital part of the company’s strategy going forward. Pursglove noted that international business already accounts for about 15 percent of eBay’s total revenue. "We see the day when the international side will either equal or outdistance the U.S. market," he said. "EBay is just as relevant internationally as in the U.S. The desire to barter is probably part of human DNA."

Biochemical speculation notwithstanding, the Yankee Group’s Kishore affirmed eBay’s overseas potential. "Some products and services are dependent on behavior characteristics of market groups or nationalities. Not so with eBay; it is highly extensible."

The company’s UK and German operations are the fastest growing, with Korea and Australia also doing well, according to Pursglove. In fact, there is only one weak spot to date: Japan, where Yahoo! Auctions became entrenched first and enjoys a level of market dominance resembling eBay’s U.S. position.

Given the company’s negative experience in Japan, what should an observer conclude about eBay’s U.S. success? Does the auction giant provide superior service, or was it simply in the right place at the right time?

The Yankee Group’s Kishore said it is important to balance both sides of the equation. "Sound management is a reason for any company’s success. At the same time, luck is usually associated with sucecss."

The end result is that eBay has transformed from a boutique secpialty site into a rival-stomping juggernaut - the Wal-Mart of online auctions. If it can continue to pull the right strings, fulfill the needs of its enormous and diverse community, and keep its Web site technology aimed at the lowest common denominator, it is likely to retain its "invincible" status. And though luck may be a factor, so is a bulletproof business model and a ferociously focused management team.

EBay Plans to Shut Down Half.com Unit

EBay Inc. said Thursday it would shut down Half.com, its fixed-price subsidiary for used books, CDs, videos and other common household items, in late 2004.

Half.com founder Josh Kopelman also said he would leave the company’s office in Plymouth Meeting, Pa., effective April 15.

The San Jose, Calif.-based online auction company purchased Half.com in a June 2000 stock swap. The acquisition of Half.com, which at the time listed about 1 million items and had about 250,000 registered users, significantly increased eBay’s operating expenses for several quarters.

Founded in October 1999, Half.com sold previously owned products such as books, DVDs and board games for at least half the retail price. Sellers

typed in a number corresponding to a bar code on most products, automatically providing them with the official list price.

The company gained fame in May 2000, when it persuaded politicians in tiny Halfway, Ore., to change the town's name to Half.com. Despite complaints from many residents who considered it a silly marketing gimmick, the city erected a sign that said, "Welcome to Half.com Oregon, America's first dot-com city."

Half.com's 65 employees in suburban Philadelphia may relocate to other eBay offices by the end of next year, or they will be eligible for severance packages, eBay spokesman Kevin Pursglove said.

Blog Publishers Stealing Web Limelight

Visitors to Daypop, an index of personal journalism sites known as Weblogs, were treated on Wednesday to a new feature called "word bursts," an automated attempt to identify the hottest words at the moment.

"They are indicators of what Webloggers are writing about right now," boasts the site, at http://www.daypop.com/burst/.

The "word burst" concept was borrowed from a New Scientist magazine article about a Cornell mathematician who came up with the idea. It has taken on a life of its own, making the featured words popular if only because the Daypop site said so and major Web sites were all pointing to the site for the latest buzz.

It's just the latest example of the power of Weblogs to shape perception among a growing audience of online readers.

Weblogs, or blogs for short, the online diaries that first flowered among would-be Emily Dickinsons in cyberspace, are now taking root among office workers and university students and drawing attention from big media who hope to tap their appeal.

"One of the things that got clobbered in the money-hungry Internet boom of late 1990s was the role of the individual," said John Lawlor, an independent marketing consultant and devoted blogger at http://www.blogs4business.com.

"Blogs are a friction-free way to communicate" that restores power to individuals with something to say, Lawlor said.

Blogs are simple Web-page publishing tools that hundreds of thousands of Internet users regularly use to write annotated guides to the best of the woolly world of the Web.

They do so with a freshness and passion that has drawn the attention of major Internet media companies, as highlighted by last week's purchase by Web search powerhouse Google of Pyra Labs, the tiny band of San Francisco programmers behind Blogger, the most popular software tool for creating Web logs.

Blogs feed other blogs, cross-referencing each other via hyperlinks. An endless series of underground gopher tunnels, the typical blog has 50 to 100 links to other sites.

The phenomenon is changing the basic metaphors for how the Web works. Bloggers don’t so much surf as clip excerpts from the Internet, then share these choice tidbits with friends, colleagues, and passers-by from other blogs.

Successful blogs have certain obsessions that set them apart. In contrast to Web sites that try to be all things to all people, blogs do best when they stake out niches. "Who is saying something interesting today?" is their basic appeal.

Blogs4God offers what it humbly calls a "semi-definitive list of Christian Blogs" (http://blogs4god.com). Gizmodo, "the gadgets Weblog," serves gadget idolatrists as it drools over the latest consumer electronics eye-candy.

Take "Editor: Myself" (http://www.hoder.com/weblog), a free-wheeling Weblog on "Iran, technology and pop culture."

The site appears in both Persian and English, offering links to other Iranian bloggers, a glimpse of the struggle Web publishers are having with religious authorities interspersed with amusing links to wire service news stories out of Iran.

Dave Winer, a pioneering Silicon Valley-based software programmer who is widely credited with spearheading the self-publishing movement, sees blogging following a well-worn path into the mainstream.

"At first the geeks go for a new information technology. It is required for that to happen. Then you have the lawyers and the librarians. Following very closely after that comes education and business," he said.

Winer, whose six-years-and-running "Scripting News" is one of the oldest surviving blogs, recently launched a project called "Weblogs at Harvard" which seeks to string together the dozens of blogs with Web addresses ending in .harvard.edu.

Law school students are using blogs to share case law studies online, while one business school student is keeping an online diary as a reminder of how his thinking evolves at Harvard. The rest of us voyeurs can catch a glimpse at http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/about, in a way no fan of "reality-based" dating shows on U.S. television can ever do.

Winer looks to use his position as a fellow at Harvard’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society, to highlight the potential blogs have not only at America’s most prestigious university, but throughout education.

Lawlor, of Blogs4Business, a consultant living in Florida who has spent years in online direct marketing, sees blogs as an antidote to the inherent weaknesses of e-mail, a static form of communication that is in danger of becoming buried in the growing flood of SPAM, or unsolicited advertising.

E-mail, while having the advantage of privacy, requires waiting for someone to send you something. Blogs stay put in one place, with an open-door policy for visitors, he notes. The publisher controls the content. Visitors keep coming back only if the publisher keeps the site fresh and relevant to them.

Lawlor, 57, has a plan to bring blogging to technical trade shows. The idea is to encourage all the companies participating in a conference to display their wares on their own blog, then encourage attendees to visit

the blogs ahead of time, helping them schedule appointments during the trade show itself.

Technology can do little for people who have nothing to say.

Some blog entries take the form of no more than one or two-sentence gasps. Business-minded Lawlor refers dismissively to the mass of blogs as "angst journals" even as he upholds the form as a model of effective small group communication. With names like gigglechick and worldwiderant, one doesn't even need to click to imagine where such blogs are headed.

Tripod, a Web page building unit of online media company Terra Lycos, is experimenting along with Fox Sports to offer blogs that appeal to hockey fans. Officials see a vast market among the millions of customers who have built band, movie and art sites using Tripod.

"I think that crossover with media is definitely there," Charles Kilby, director of product marketing for Terra Lycos said in a phone interview. "We are looking at how to take this mainstream."

A spokeswoman for AOL, the largest Internet services company, says they won't be far behind. "We do have blogs under development. It's something that members will see later this year," she told Reuters.

Earthlink, another major U.S. Internet service provider, announced a deal in October with Trellix, another supplier of blogging software, but has yet to offer the services to its customers.

Enraged Computer Owner Shoots Up Machine

George Doughty hung his latest hunting trophy on the wall of his Sportsman's Bar and Restaurant. Then he went to jail.

The problem was the trophy was Doughty's laptop computer.

He shot it four times, as customers watched, after it crashed once too often.

He was jailed on suspicion of felony menacing, reckless endangerment and the prohibited use of weapons.

"It's sort of funny, because everybody always threatens their computers," said police Lt. Rick Bashor, seconds before his own police computer froze at police headquarters.

Doughty was released Monday evening after spending a night in jail and is due in court Wednesday.

In police reports, Doughty said that he realized afterward that he shouldn't have shot his computer but at the time it seemed like the right thing to do.

=~=~=~=

Atari Online News, Etc. is a weekly publication covering the entire Atari community. Reprint permission is granted, unless otherwise noted at the beginning of any article, to Atari user groups and not for profit publications only under the following terms: articles must remain unedited and include the issue number and author at the top of each article reprinted. Other reprints granted upon approval of request. Send requests to: dpj@atarinews.org

No issue of Atari Online News, Etc. may be included on any commercial media, nor uploaded or transmitted to any commercial online service or internet site, in whole or in part, by any agent or means, without the expressed consent or permission from the Publisher or Editor of Atari Online News, Etc.

Opinions presented herein are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the staff, or of the publishers. All material herein is believed to be accurate at the time of publishing.